

August 6, 2004

**ON THE 39TH ANNIVERSARY OF
VOTING RIGHTS ACT, LET'S BOOST YOUTH VOTER
PARTICIPATION:
CO-SPONSOR "THE GATEWAY TO DEMOCRACY ACT"**

Dear Colleague:

On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act to ensure that all citizens would have equal access to the right to vote regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social status or personal wealth.

Unfortunately, ensuring the right to vote does not guarantee exercise of the franchise every eligible American. The young people of our country are a prominent example of a group of citizens with low voting rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 2000 general election, only 45 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds were registered to vote and only 32 percent actually voted. This is why **I have recently introduced H.R. 4972, the "Gateway to Democracy Act," a bill that will make voter registration easier and more convenient for young people.**

The Gateway to Democracy Act is very simple. It would require the states to provide anyone under 18 the opportunity to pre-register to vote when applying for a driver's license. Too many young people miss voting in the first few elections after they reach age 18 simply because they have not yet registered to vote. By providing a system of pre-registration, young people applying for a driver's license will finally have equal access to the voting registration process.

Several states already have successful pre-registration programs. For example, **Connecticut, Florida and Maine** allow people to pre-register to vote at age 17, **Georgia, Missouri, and Iowa** allow people to pre-register at age 17 1/2 and **Hawaii** allows people to pre-register at age 16. These programs have proven that pre-registration programs are simple and effective.

On this 39th anniversary we should reaffirm our commitment to goal of equal access and to ensure that all eligible voters have an equal opportunity to vote in their first election

If you have any question or would like to co-sponsor HR 4972, please contact Kate Reinhalter on my staff at 5-2836 or katharine.reinhalter@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

Current Co-Sponsors: Rep Donna M. Christensen, Rep Peter Deutsch, Rep Martin Frost, Rep Maurice D. Hinchey, Rep John Lewis, Rep Michael R. McNulty, Rep Major R Owens, Rep Tim Ryan, Rep Linda T. Sanchez, Rep. Sherrod Brown,* Rep. Bernie Sanders*

*Co-sponsored during the August Recess